The multiplicity of the research assessment process is only expected given the sheer vastness of India's research and academic ecosystem. To understand them better - the good, the bad, and the ugly - a joint collaborative workshop was organized by DST-CPR, IISc and INVAS on 24th and 25th June, 2022. Early and mid-career researchers from about 40 research institutions participated in the online two-day workshop to debate and deliberate on the current practices and the workable recommendations.

Different yardsticks are needed for different contributions - research, mentorship, teaching, administrative responsibilities, institute building, science outreach and science communication.

Obsession over Journal Impact Factor is undermining research quality.
Reputed academic society journals might not have as high-impact factor as commercial publishers but regularly publish high quality research, and need as much importance.

Contribution in a publication/project, not position in list of authors/PIs, should be considered
Acknowledge and give due credit to all the authors in a publication based on their contribution instead of only to the first and corresponding authors.

Crosstalk among granting agency
A common online portal to avoid duplicacy of similar projects across all national funding agencies.

Equity and inclusion
Flexibility in the assessment process to address various challenges faced by women scientists.

Clearly spelt out policies and guidelines.
Institutionalised policies and guidelines are needed at every stage for recruitment, promotion, and project grants. This will avoid the confusion that the current informal ones create. Reviewers need to be sensitised about review guidelines.

Include quantitative metrics in research assessment
but only those which can identify the research acumen of the applicant without creating unintended biases.

Diversity of review committee
Young scientists, cross-disciplinary experts, field practitioners/community members, and other relevant experts/stakeholders (e.g., industry) should be part of the review committee.

Grants management
Strengthening human resources in grants management teams and their capacity development. Research managers may be introduced in the system to make it more efficient, especially for faculty members who are having more projects.
RESEARCH ASSESSMENT IN INDIA
WHAT SHOULD STAY, WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

HOW TO INCREASE TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY?

Open assessments, sharing detailed peer review feedback
with the candidates, and disclose the reviewers and review committee in the institution/funding agency website.
Online tracking of projects should be made available at each and every stage.

Diversity of peer review committee
Inclusion of direct/indirect stakeholders (industry, communities, etc.) along with subject (academic) experts.

Few prestigious journals and awards
in a given field should be listed and considered for assessment.
Legitimate awards should be identified by the institutions and only those should be considered for recruitment/promotion.

Forgoing a one-size-fits-all approach
Assessment should be based on the field of research; each field has a different feasible level of output in terms of papers and patents.

Selections through external peer/expert review followed by internal vetting for recruitment and promotion
National and international peers including those suggested by the applicants should be considered for promotions/recruitments in all stages. This will also address issues related to conflict of interest in the selection committee.

Assessment criteria should not be evaluator specific
Having a clear and transparent process of assessment (shortlisting, peer review, result announcement, etc.) and guidelines for assessment of proposals and reports.
Qualitative impressions for categorising output shouldn’t be vague.

Diversity of review committee
Young scientists, cross-disciplinary experts, field practitioners/community members, and other relevant experts/stakeholders (eg., industry) should be part of the review committee.

Publications beyond research articles
Publication counts should go beyond research articles and consider other outputs, such as outreach, teaching, and training materials.

"Diversity of peer review committee"
"Publications counts beyond research articles"
"Forgoing a one-size-fits-all approach"
"Qualitative impressions for categorizing output shouldn't be vague"

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RESEARCH ASSESSMENT IN INDIA
WHAT SHOULD STAY, WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

Lack of transparency in metrics of assessment policies/guidelines
and even if there is, they are not followed in true spirit. Long delays in decisions also become a hurdle for researchers.

Too much stress on quantitative metrics
(number of publications and impact factor based evaluation) and not enough acknowledgement for services like contribution to policy, outreach, reviewing, mentoring, etc.

Impact of research
No feedback on closure reports are provided to the PIs

Benchmarking of research excellence is based on global standards
but local hurdles (funding, infrastructure, etc.) are not taken into consideration. Further, project outcomes of premier research institutes and a state funded college or university are judged with the same metrics.

Too frequent (annual) assessments
Researcher needs at least 3 years to show results (matching the grant cycle).

Following very stringent criteria based on a point based system
(teaching, research, and administrative work). Researchers, especially in state universities, do not have basic facilities to support their research, and hence becomes an unfair system for them.

Leadership changes in institutions change research priorities
This adds to lack of clarity on what the assessment metrics are prioritising as well - quantitative or qualitative, numbers or impact, and so on.

"Too frequent (annual) assessments"
"Assessment is heavily biased by past experience/publication records"
"Lack of transparency"
"Too much stress on quantitative metrics"
RESEARCH ASSESSMENT IN INDIA

WHAT SHOULD STAY, WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

GOOD PRACTICES FOR WIDER ADOPTIONS

"Focus on translational research"

Accounting the first project’s performance for future project applications

For recruitment and promotion of researchers, some institutions are focusing on the track record of researchers in developing innovative technologies. This is a direct result of increased focus on the impact of science on society.

Funding agencies like SERB take previous performance into account while considering applicants for future funding which also acts as incentive for better performance.

External peer review with field relevant expertise for all institutions/ universities/ research organizations.

Constructive comments communicated to applicants

DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance (India Alliance) summarise the reviewer comments and share them with the PIs along with mentorship on further development of the project proposal, if needed.

Department Chair positions to young faculties

in IITs as a recognition of their exemplary work. Such career incentives motivate researchers to do better.

"A talk on future research goals by applicants"

A talk on future research goals by applicants during recruitment and promotions to convey how their research aligns with the institution's goals, national priorities, and/or adds to the larger knowledge pool.

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